

NEW YORK STATE

*Christopher Columbus
Quincentenary*

COMMISSION



Setting Our Course:

The New York State Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission



Bust of Christopher
Columbus by Italian sculptor
Ferruccio Vezzoni, New York
State Capitol, Albany.

*Although no one knows
precisely what Columbus
looked like, it is believed that
he was taller than average,
had an aquiline nose, blue
eyes, a ruddy and freckled
complexion, high cheekbones,
and red hair that turned
prematurely gray.*



Columbus dramatically changed the course of history when he crossed the unknown Sea of Darkness and landed on an island in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492, christening it San Salvador. He failed to realize his dream of discovering a western sea route to Asia, yet the impact of his Atlantic crossings five hundred years ago reverberates today.

The contact between Europe and the Western Hemisphere generated a rich multicultural and multiethnic legacy, a complex interdependent world, and an indomitable spirit of inquiry. These are the themes of the New York State Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission.

Columbus has been an important historic figure for New York State. The first Columbus Day celebration took place in New York in 1790, and it was this State that made October 12th a legal holiday in 1908, 26 years before the federal government designated it a national holiday.

The 500th anniversary makes our tradition of giving recognition to Columbus more meaningful. What was the world like for the diverse groups of Native American Indians who populated the Western Hemisphere before the arrival of the Europeans? What was happening in the Old World that prompted the age of exploration? What was the impact of the encounter on both sides of the Atlantic? An understanding of our shared past—of Columbus, his times and the events that shaped today's world—will enhance our understanding of the present and provide us direction for the future.

Seeking Harmony in Diversity

Who could have imagined what was to come when Europe came into contact with the Western Hemisphere 500 years ago? There began an irreversible flow of people, their ideas and values; the interaction in the New World of people of different races, religions, and cultures; and their struggle to live in harmony.

The changes that ensued make 15th-century Europe unrecognizable in many ways. However, there are similarities. Discrimination and intolerance were a part of Columbus' world. The expulsion of the Jesuits, the Jews and the Moors from Spain occurred during his lifetime.

When Columbus arrived on what he thought were the shores of the East Indies, the door was opened to European colonization and influence. Unknown diseases and slavery were introduced into the Western Hemisphere with tragic consequences for the indigenous populations whom Columbus named Indians.

The Columbus quincentenary offers us an opportunity to heighten our sensitivity to the history and culture of people of all ethnic backgrounds, understand the nature of intolerance, and celebrate our origins. The story of exploration, colonization and our development as a Nation is largely rooted in the relationship between the Western Hemisphere and the Mediterranean World. Too often ignored, this is a story that can be re-told through the quincentenary commemoration.

The story of the encounter has special implications for New York State. Nowhere in the Americas is there greater diversity than New York, a state which has always been the gateway and home for a large share of the nation's immigrants. In New York City alone, immigrants constitute over a quarter of the population and speak more than 150 different languages. Through the quincentenary, we will draw on our rich heritage and recognize the influence of diverse ethnic



Painting by Cristoforo De Grassi "View of Genoa Harbour in 1480" ("Veduta del Porto di Genova nel 1480") kept at the Civico Museo Navale di Genova. Photo by the Cultural Property Department of the Genoa Municipality, Photographic Archives (Servizio Beni Culturali del Comune di Genova, Archivio Fotografico).

Columbus first acquired a feeling for the sea and his nautical skills in this great maritime, cartographic and trade center.

groups to the development of our society. How symbolic and appropriate that the 1992 quincentenary coincides with the Centennial of Ellis Island!

Navigating Toward Global Interdependence

Many factors quickened the age of exploration and adventure. Among them was the hope of bringing Christianity to new lands and the need to find a sea route to Asia. With the rise of the Ottoman Turks, Europe was denied overland access to Asia, the source of spices, dyes, precious metals and other commodities important to its economic life. By studying the unsettled times during which Columbus lived, into the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, we can appreciate the intricate cultural, economic, and political considerations that form our current relationships with other nations.

Columbus brought the world closer and began a whole new era of exploration and understanding. 500 years later, the world grows smaller through greater interdependence for all members of society.

The quincentenary is an international commemoration which will promote international studies and international trade. It is an opportunity to reach out not only to Italy, Spain, and Portugal—where Columbus acquired the skills and inspiration for his Atlantic crossings—but also all nations whose histories are tied to events 500 years ago.

Crossing New Frontiers

Experts of his day considered Columbus' proposal madness. However, at 41, with the support of the Spanish monarchs Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, he set sail in August 1492. As captain general, he commanded 90 sailors aboard the flagship Santa Maria and two caravels, the Nina and the Pinta.

It is well to remember just how crude and simple the equipment and techniques of his day were. On board the ship, time was kept by a sand clock, a half-

hour glass which had to be turned every thirty minutes. Navigators did not think of direction in terms of compass points or of degrees but in terms of the winds, *los vientos*. Yet, Columbus voyaged across uncharted oceans, twice as far as anyone had ever sailed before. His men were near mutiny when they made landfall on the thirty-third day.

Exalted on his return to Spain as the Admiral of the Ocean Seas, Columbus made three more voyages across the Atlantic—in 1493, 1498 and 1502—and maintained his belief that his discoveries were part of the Asian continent. Just as there are multiple perspectives in interpreting the past, there are differing views regarding Columbus himself and biographical information remains inconclusive. Nonetheless, it was this self-taught and fearless seaman who persevered with uncommon resourcefulness against political, financial and physical obstacles and changed the course of history with the force of his convictions.

The encounter between Europe and the Western Hemisphere opened up a new era of exploration in every area of human endeavor. There were immediate and dramatic advances in navigational and mining techniques, in cartography and geography. Further developments were spurred on in the sciences, economics, arts, and the frontiers of the mind.

The observance of the quincentenary would be incomplete if it did not open new horizons of possibilities and, as stated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in "Possibilities," challenge each to be

*An admiral sailing the high seas of thought,
Fearless and first, and steering with his fleet,
For lands not yet laid down in any chart.*

World map of German cartographer Henricus Martellus who worked in Florence at the end of the 15th century. By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London.

These were the boundaries of Columbus' world. The Middle Ages were drawing to an end and making way for the flowering of the Renaissance Era. Well-known contemporaries of Columbus included the founder of the Jesuit order Saint Ignatius of Loyola; artist and engineer Leonardo da Vinci; sculptor, painter, architect and poet Michelangelo; scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam; and the Venetian navigator John Cabot.





The Landing of Columbus on the Island of Guanahane on October 12, 1492 by Dioscoro Puebla.

Washington Irving, Columbus' first American biographer, writes that "his conduct was characterized by the grandeur of his views and the magnanimity of his spirit...he sought to ascertain their soil and productions, their rivers and harbors; he was desirous of colonizing and cultivating them; of conciliating and civilizing the natives; of building cities; introducing the useful arts; subjecting every thing to the control of law, order, and religion; and thus of founding regular and prosperous empires."

The New York State Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Commission was established by Executive Order No. 112 on October 12, 1988, to promote and plan activities for the 1992 international observance of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyages. Matilda Raffa Cuomo is chairperson and Robert F. Wagner is honorary chairperson of the Commission.

The Commission welcomes information on Columbus-related activities that are underway. It urges schools, organizations, communities, and elected officials throughout the State to incorporate the themes of the Commission into meaningful programs for 1992.

Please direct information and questions to:

Matilda Raffa Cuomo
Chairperson

NYS Christopher Columbus
Quincentenary Commission
4 Burnett Boulevard
Poughkeepsie, New York 12603

Junnko Haverlick, *Director*

Telephone: (914) 431-5913
Fax: (914) 431-5971

NEW YORK STATE
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS QUINCENTENARY
COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mrs. Matilda Raffa Cuomo
Chairperson

The Honorable Robert F. Wagner
Honorary Chairperson

Dr. John Brademas
Mr. Peter A. Cohen
Ms. Ida Pais Commins
The Honorable Alfonse M. D'Amato
The Honorable Angier B. Duke
Mr. Roger A. Enrico
Mr. Theodore J. Forstmann
Mr. Mario J. Gabelli
Mrs. Danielle Gardner
The Honorable Richard N. Gardner
Ms. Yvonne J. Graham
Mrs. Kitty Carlisle Hart
Mr. John F. Hudacs

Mrs. Peter D. Kiernan
Dr. Joseph A. Laria
Ms. Isabelle Leeds
Mr. Leon Levy
The Honorable Tarky J. Lombardi, Jr.
The Honorable George H. Madison
The Honorable John J. Marchi
The Honorable Anthony M. Masiello
The Honorable Olga A. Mendez
Dr. Hugo M. Morales
The Hon. Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Dr. Ronald B. Odrich

The Honorable George Onorato
The Hon. William F. Passannante
Mrs. Louise Riggio
Mr. Dennis Rivera
Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller
Mr. Frederic V. Salerno
The Honorable Jose E. Serrano
Dr. Thomas Sobol
Mr. Vincent Tese
Ms. Carolyn R. Wall
Mr. Franklin E. White
Ms. Minerva White
Mrs. Whitney M. Young

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Albany, NY
Permit No. 626

HALL OF FAME FOR GREAT
AMERICANS
BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY AVE AT WEST 181 ST
BRONX NY 10453 *